

The Arizona Early Intervention Program Connecting with AzEIP

The following is a letter to families from Maureen Casey. Maureen is a parent member of the Interagency Coordinating Council (ICC), which advises and assists AzEIP. Maureen, the mother of three young children, including a child with special needs, is an "early intervention veteran," and is pleased to be able to share some of her insights into early intervention and the ongoing redesign of Arizona's early intervention system.

The Arizona Early Intervention Program – AzEIP – provides early intervention services and supports to eligible children and their families when a child has a disability or is not reaching certain milestones. Parents are the experts on their own children; professionals know how children grow and learn in general. Together parents and professionals can work together on a team to help you, the parents, help your child. We know that from birth to age three, children grow and change at a very fast rate. We also know that it is important that young children who need early intervention services get those services in a way that does not isolate them or their families from their community. This means that services should be a part of their everyday lives.

AzEIP is working to ensure that Arizona's children and families in the Early Intervention program receive the services and supports that they need, in ways that maximize the benefit of those services and supports. Community forums were held across the State so that early intervention families and professionals could have the opportunity to talk about what they think works and what needs fixing. AzEIP did research and talked with other states to see how their programs work for their children and families. When a plan for Arizona was drafted, families and professionals were invited to review the plan and provide comments.

What does the system redesign mean for you if your child is receiving services from AzEIP?
Providing services and supports in teams with a team lead:

Early intervention services and supports are decided on and written into a child's Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) by a team. You—the family—are an important and equal member of that team. One thing we heard from families was that the way AzEIP purchases services affects the way you receive them. If we buy occupational therapy services from one group and use a different vendor for physical therapy, then it is hard to make sure that everyone knows one another and are working together on the team. For instance, some families have told us that they know someone visits their child at the daycare center, but they don't know who they are or what they do with the child. This is not how early intervention services



should work. Other parents tell us that they make decisions, but don't always feel that they have enough information to feel confident that their decision is the right one for their child. This is not right, either. To improve the system, the way in which services are purchased will change. Each group contracting to provide

early intervention services will make sure that each team has available, at a minimum: Occupational Therapist, Physical Therapist, Psychologist, Social Worker, Special Instruction Provider, Speech therapist, and a Service Coordinator.

You and the other members of your team will decide who will be the team lead. Since you and your family may not need the services of all the team members, the team lead will make sure that the other members of the team know what is going on, and will coordinate with the other team members. Families have told us that sometimes they have felt overwhelmed, and that it often seemed like each provider was working on their own thing, and wasn't necessarily aware of what other providers were doing. This will change with the new teams and team leads. By having more professionals on your team, you will get the benefit of different specialties and viewpoints, but it will not mean that you and your child have to have another new face in your home on a regular basis. Instead, this extra helper will coach the folks who are visiting with you in your home.

The system redesign, which will bring about changes in how we buy services, may mean that you will have some changes in who provides services to your child and family. You may have to decide which vendor will provide services to your child and family. The best way to do this is to talk to your providers and your service coordinator, and to keep in mind the outcomes you want for your child and family.

Changes to the system should be in effect by next summer. This will give you time to know what the changes are and how they will affect you. You will have time to ask questions. The goal of the system redesign is to improve the way children and their families receive services from AzEIP. We encourage you to keep in touch with us as we make these changes, and help us to provide you with meaningful services and supports.

This column is a collaboration between AzEIP, Raising Special Kids and Pilot Parents of Southern Arizona to benefit families of young children with disabilities in Arizona. If you have questions or suggestions for content, or if you would like information on council or committee meetings or to be on AzEIP's mailing list, call Maxine Piper at AzEIP: (602) 532-9960 or (888) 439-5609 or email allazeip2@azdes.gov